# First Three Years Challenging for Early Settlers

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The first settlers in the Fairbury area had a challenging first three years. They endured the worst blizzard in a century, the Black Hawk Indian War, and they had to be completely self-reliant.

This story began with the Kickapoo tribe moving to a location about four miles south of Fairbury in 1828. There were about 650 members of the Kickapoo tribe living in 97 wigwams with a council house. Two important Native American foot trails met where the Kickapoo village was located south of Fairbury. The Sauk and Kickapoo trail ran southeast from Ottawa to Danville. South of Fairbury, the Kickapoo trail branched off from the main course and ran east to Indiana.

In 1830, the Kickapoo tribe moved ten miles east to what was later named Oliver's Grove south of Chatsworth. The tribe likely chose to move east so the village would still be located on the Kickapoo trail to Indiana.

The winter of 1830-1831 was one of the worst on record. Blizzard conditions and heavy snowfall caused many of the wild animals to starve and freeze to death. In 1830, just as the Kickapoo moved from Fairbury to Oliver's Grove, Valentine Darnall settled south of Fairbury.

The Darnall family had several interactions with the Kickapoo tribe. When they first arrived, the Kickapoo gave them some beans they had cultivated. These beans prevented the Darnall family from starving during the terrible winter of 1830-1831. The following autumn, the Kickapoo asked Darnall if they could leave their supply of maple sugar with him until the next spring. Darnall fulfilled their request and returned the maple sugar to the Kickapoo the following spring. Years later, Darnall was asked if he was tempted to eat some of the maple sugar. Darnall admitted he was mightily tempted to eat some of the sugar, but he stopped cold when he discovered it was thick with dog hairs.

The story was often recited that Mrs. Darnall once asked an old Chief if he and his tribesmen would kill them if an uprising should occur. The old Chief is said to have replied, "Oh yes, but we kill them quickly," meaning that they would not be tortured.

In the Fall of 1831, Joseph Moore arrived and settled in Indian Grove township. Joseph emigrated from Overton County, Tennessee. This county was about 100 miles east of Nashville, and it was 450 miles from Overton County to the Fairbury area. Nineteen-year-old Joseph walked the trip to Illinois while his 21-year-old wife Nancy Ann Travis rode a horse holding their infant son Richard M. Moore.

Also, in 1831, William and Rebecca Popejoy emigrated from Ohio to Avoca Township, north of Fairbury. William was 38 years of age, and his wife Rebecca was 26 when they relocated to the Fairbury area.

In 1832, the large William McDowell family arrived and settled about five miles north of Fairbury on Indian Creek. The McDowells at once proceeded to erect their cabin. They brought with them a few panes of glass for a window. The boards that furnished the material for their house's door and window casing were purchased from the Kickapoo tribe and were brought from Oliver's Grove with an ox team. The Kickapoo traded the hewn wood for a small supply of ammunition.

Also, in 1832, the Franklin Oliver family was heading west from New Jersey. They camped for the night about three miles south of present-day Chatsworth. The family discovered they had camped in the middle of the Kickapoo camp. Although Franklin Oliver did not usually smoke tobacco, he later recounted he made a wise decision to share the peace pipe shared by the Kickapoo Chief that evening.

Another Overton County family arrived in Indian Grove Township in 1832. A. B. "Barney" Phillips had been a neighbor of Joseph Moore back in Overton County. John Raney Phillips was born on May 9, 1932, shortly after the family arrived in Illinois. John R. Phillips was the first European child born in the history of Livingston County. Unfortunately, John R. Phillips died of smallpox in 1864 while serving in the Civil War.

Shortly after Barney Phillips arrived in Indian Grove township, he lost some hogs and started walking looking for them. Barney thought he was the only settler in the area, so he was shocked when he encountered the McDowell family camp. The McDowells were unsure if he was European or Native American because Phillips was dressed in a typical Tennessee backwoodsman dress. Mr. Phillips and the McDowells became close friends after this encounter.

In April of 1932, the Black Hawk War started. This war was a conflict between the United States and Native Americans led by Black Hawk, a Sauk leader. The early settlers did not know if the large Kickapoo tribe south of Chatsworth would join the war and become their enemy. Franklin Oliver met with the Kickapoo, and the Chief suggested that Oliver stay and the rest of the settlers should temporarily go to Indiana until the war was over. Thirty-one of the early colonists loaded their seven families onto six wagons and left for Indiana. Franklin Oliver remained in his home.

Valentine Darnall and Barney Phillips chose to relocate to the Mackinaw area temporarily. The Black Hawk War was over in five months, and all the settlers returned to their homes in the Fairbury area. The Kickapoo south of Chatsworth did not participate in the Black Hawk War. They were forced to leave the state of Illinois in late 1832.

After the war was over, Valentine Darnall began to raise sheep. The wives of Valentine Darnall and A. B. Phillips learned how to card, spin, and weave the wool into cloth. Many other wives of the early settlers then also learned how to process the wool.

Cash was very scarce, and most settlers did not earn more than $15 to $20 per year. This income in 1832 would be equivalent to $475 in today's dollars. There were no schools for the children to attend, so they helped on the farms. These pioneer settlers had to be entirely self-reliant to meet their daily living needs.

Approximately 650 members of the Kickapoo Tribe were living in Livingston County when the first white settlers arrived